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CELEBRATING THE WONDER OF CREATION

Like autumn leaves, our bodies bear the marks of our mortality. But do we disrespect and neglect our bodies in the present because they will be replaced by incorruptible bodies in the future?

In the following pages, educator and naturalist Dean Ohlman helps us to see that as we care for our own bodies, we also have reason to care for the world around us. Both are products of God's handiwork, both require our faithful stewardship, and both share the promise of future restoration.

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THE JOY OF CREATION

In *Pollution And The Death Of Man: The Christian View Of Ecology*, Francis Schaeffer says that Charles Darwin near the end of his life found that two things had become dull to him: his joy in the arts and his joy in nature. Schaeffer comments on the irony of this great naturalist losing his enthusiasm for the very thing he had made his life's calling. Then he continues:

We are seeing today . . . the same loss of joy in our total culture as Darwin personally experienced: first of all in the area of the arts, then in the area of nature. The distressing thing about this is that . . . Christians often really have had no better sense about these things than unbelievers. The death of joy in nature is leading to the death

of nature itself (p.11).

Schaeffer also tells the story of visiting a Christian school in the 1960s that was located across a ravine from a "hippie community." Curious, Schaeffer crossed the ravine to learn more about the settlement. He discovered that the

"The death of joy in nature is leading to the death of nature itself."

—Francis Schaeffer

commune was clearly pagan—even conducting pagan earth rituals common to the New Age Movement today. But he was also struck with how attractive the community was and how carefully they kept the land. The difference between the grounds of the two communities was extreme. The leader of the pagan

commune even commented to Schaeffer about the “ugliness” of the Christian school. Schaeffer tells of his reaction to that comment:

It was then that I realized what a horrible situation this was. When I stood on the Christian ground and looked at the Bohemian people's place, it was beautiful. They had even gone to the trouble of running their electric cables under the level of the trees so that they couldn't be seen. Then I stood on the pagan ground and looked at the Christian community and saw ugliness. That is horrible. Here you have a Christianity that is failing to take into account man's responsibility and proper relationship to nature (p.42).

Schaeffer's book was not just another commentary on the decline of Christianity; it was a call to apply biblical

principles to the world's growing environmental problems. It was an invitation to rediscover the wonder of God in creation. It was a reminder that we are not as likely to care for one another if we have forgotten the high calling of God to appreciate and care for all that He has made.

It's not too late to find joy and renewed worship in an awareness that was expressed by George MacDonald more than a hundred years ago:

If it were not for the outside world, we should have no inside world to understand things by. Least of all could we understand God without these millions of sights and sounds and scents and motions weaving their endless harmonies. They come out from His heart to let us know a little of what is in it (*What's Mine's Mine*, p.29).

GOD'S RELATION TO CREATION

GOD MADE IT AND OWNS IT

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1).

The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is Mine and you are but aliens and My tenants (Lev. 25:23 NIV).

The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein (Ps. 24:1).

The Word of God tells us that "God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). And according to the New Testament, the same Jesus who came into this world to rescue us from ourselves is the One who first made our world and everything that is in it.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were

created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him (Col. 1:15-16).

***The same Jesus
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this world
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George MacDonald wrote, "If the world is God's, every true man and woman ought to feel at home in it. Something is wrong if the calm of the summer night does not sink into the heart,

for it embodies the peace of God. Something is wrong in the man to whom the sunrise is not a divine glory, for therein is embodied the truth, the simplicity, and the might of the Maker.” This 19th-century writer obviously believed and understood that we live and breathe in a world that shouts the reality of God from every piece of matter and every natural event.

Almost without question, the most significant difference between the worldview of the Bible and the beliefs of secular humanism is the Christian understanding that God made the earth and it belongs to Him. What comes of this belief is significant. When we are users and occupiers of property that belongs to someone else, we rightfully consider the interests of the owner as well as our own. In fact, as tenants and stewards, our

own interests are secondary to that of the owner.

Our challenge in any use of the land, air, time, or life that belongs to God is to ask how we can use what He has made so that we will honor Him and find joy for ourselves. More than a hundred years ago, Adam Clarke saw the practical implications of God’s ownership when he wrote:

The works of the Lord are multitudinous and varied. They are so constructed as to show the most consummate wisdom in their design, and in the end for which they are formed. They are all God’s property, and should be used only in reference to the end for which they were created. All abuse and waste of God’s creatures are spoil and robbery on the property of the Creator (quoted by Spurgeon in *The Treasury Of David*, p.335).

“All abuse and waste of God’s creatures are spoil and robbery on the property of the Creator.” How that

“All abuse and waste of God’s creatures are spoil and robbery on the property of the Creator.”

—Adam Clarke

reality should awaken us to a fuller awareness of our high calling to care for what God cares for!

Those words take me back to my late twenties when, as a frustrated squirrel hunter one fall, I shot a porcupine high in a huge oak—merely because it was there and I had an unspent shotgun shell in my gun! Porcupines are common in Michigan’s

north woods, and they are virtually unprotected by game laws because they are considered “nuisance animals,” like woodchucks, gophers, and chipmunks.

I believe that God, who notes the death of a common sparrow, watches over all that He has made. Now I realize that the shame I felt looking into the lifeless eyes of one of God’s creatures I had thoughtlessly wasted might have been a reflection of God’s own heart. But at the time, I passed it off as an unmanly emotion.

How can we celebrate the wonder of God in creation?

By acknowledging that as the Creator’s landholders, we are to examine the Word of God and prayerfully consider how we are to occupy His territory and manage His works in a manner that glorifies Him.

GOD LOVES IT AND CARES FOR IT

*The Lord is good to all;
He has compassion on
all He has made. . . . The
Lord is faithful to all His
promises and loving
toward all He has made.
. . . You open Your hand
and satisfy the desires of
every living thing. The
Lord is righteous in all
His ways and loving
toward all He has made
(Ps. 145:9,13,16-17 NIV).*

I have been surprised to discover how many times the psalmist declared that God has “love” and “compassion” for all the things He has created. Some of the Hebrew terms indicate that God cares for the creation in a similar way that a mother cares for the one she has given birth to.

To get a rich picture of God’s compassion and care for man, the animals, the plants, and the lifeless but dynamic forces of the earth,

read Psalms 65, 104, 145, 147, and 148. While the Sermon on the Mount expressly states that God values man above the creatures (Mt. 6:25-34), the entire thrust of Scripture—from paradise lost in Genesis to paradise regained in Revelation—is that God treasures and takes pleasure not in man alone but in everything He created.

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Itinerant preacher John Woolman, years before the American Revolution, expressed this in his diary after a long ocean voyage that resulted in the disregard

and needless death of domesticated fowl:

I often remembered the Fountain of goodness, who gave being to all creatures, and whose love extends to caring for the sparrows. I believe where the love of God is verily perfected, and the true spirit of government watchfully attended to, a tenderness toward all creatures made subject to us will be experienced, and a care felt in us that we do not lessen that sweetness of life in the animal creation which the great Creator intends for them under our government.

Psalms 145:9 declares, "The Lord is good to all; He has compassion on all He has made" (NIV). In *The Treasury Of David*, Charles Haddon Spurgeon concludes, "The duty of kindness to animals may logically be argued from

this verse. Should not the children of God be like their Father in kindness?" (p.379).

How can we celebrate the wonder of God in creation? By acknowledging God's care and compassion for the entire creation and seeking to do all we can to demonstrate that care—especially by refraining from abusing what He loves and cares for.

GOD REVEALS HIMSELF THROUGH IT

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard (Ps. 19:1-3).

In Psalm 19, David reminds us that God speaks to us through two books. One book is the

written Word of God (vv.7-11). The other revelation is the masterpiece of creation, which eloquently reveals God to every person every day. All people in all times

***God speaks to
us through two
books: the written
Word of God and
the masterpiece
of creation.***

from the very beginning have been created by God with such an awareness. Those who do not hear God speaking through the natural world have deceived themselves. The apostle Paul spelled this out clearly in his letter to the Christians in Rome:

*The wrath of God is
revealed from heaven
against all ungodliness*

and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse (Rom. 1:18-20).

A fascinating precedent for Paul's argument that God reveals Himself through the natural world is found in the ancient tragedy and poetry of Job. As the drama of Job unfolds, we find him writhing in pain, misunderstood by his friends, and confused by his own inability to explain his plight. Job was hurt. He felt abandoned and betrayed by the God he had tried to serve. He was angry

because he thought God was unfairly tormenting him and allowing his friends to think he was suffering for some terrible secret sin.

Finally, after lengthy, frustrated, and angry conversations between Job and his friends, God Himself spoke. From out of a violent whirlwind, the Creator captured Job's attention and challenged him to take another look at the natural world. The Lord asked Job to consider ecology, the animals, and the patterns of weather and seasons He had made. God humbled and then comforted Job with a series of piercing questions that begin with:

Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me.

Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if

you have understanding (Job 38:2-4).

In the middle of the questioning, God allowed Job to speak, but the devastated patriarch could only mutter, "Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer You? I lay my hand over my mouth" (40:4).

The purpose of the Creator's interrogation was for Job to understand from the world around Him that a God who is wise and powerful enough to have created the natural world is certainly great enough to know what He is doing in allowing Job's suffering.

Humbled by what God had said through the natural world, Job confessed, "I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know" (42:3).

Even when God is not speaking verbally, the study of the creation speaks with an eloquence that compels

us to stand in silent wonder before the Creator: elements of basic matter that behave in ways unimagined, and clumps of galaxies so vast in number and expanse

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that even broad human categories like “light years” become almost meaningless. Smallness gets ever smaller, and bigness gets ever bigger. The attempt to bring it all into the scope of human understanding has done what it has always done:

We either see God and worship Him in great awe and humility, or we “suppress the truth” (Rom. 1:18) and wander in self-imposed blindness.

The view that creation is God’s “other book” is supported by classical theology, which includes the creation as the major component of what is called “general revelation.” It is the revelation that has been given to all people, in all times, and in all places. This refers to the natural world and its processes, or natural law—what Paul calls “the law written in their hearts” and revealed by the conscience (Rom. 2:15). It also includes human history—the record of God’s continuous sovereign will demonstrated in the affairs of people.

Truth is revealed to us not only in special revelation (the Bible) but also in general revelation

(the creation). Christian educator Frank Gaebelein understood this well when he said, “All truth is God’s truth.”

The point that God reveals Himself to us through the natural world is captured in the hymn “I Sing The Mighty Power Of God” written by Isaac Watts:

I sing the mighty
power of God
That made the
mountains rise,
That spread the
flowing seas abroad
And built the lofty skies.
I sing the wisdom
that ordained
The sun to rule the day;
The moon shines full
at His command,
And all the stars obey.
I sing the goodness
of the Lord
That filled the earth
with food;
He formed the creatures
with His word

And then pronounced
them good.
Lord, how Thy wonders
are displayed
Where’er I turn my eye:
If I survey the
ground I tread,
Or gaze upon the sky!
There’s not a plant
or flower below
But makes Thy
glories known;
And clouds arise
and tempests blow
By order from Thy throne;
While all that borrows
life from Thee
Is ever in Thy care,
And everywhere
that man can be,
Thou, God,
art present there.

***How can we celebrate
the wonder of God in
creation?*** By observing the
creation carefully and
reverently to discover the
countless ways it reveals God
and His attributes to us.

OUR RELATION TO CREATION

WE ARE DEPENDENT UPON IT

When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people, if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land (2 Chr. 7:13-14).

He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, and vegetation for the service of man, that he may bring forth food from the earth, and wine that makes glad the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread which strengthens man's heart (Ps. 104:14-15).

We cannot survive without the fruit of the earth. While hundreds of passages in God's special revelation (the book of God's words) support this fact, general revelation (the book of God's works) also reminds us of this truth daily. We are totally dependent upon the fruitfulness of the creation for our health and livelihood.

This dependence is why we need to give careful consideration to the biblical principle of sowing and reaping. This principle says, in essence, that if we sow foolish and sinful behavior, we will reap negative consequences. Sometimes the consequences are the result of God's direct action in punishment for sin, such as the curse on creation that resulted from Adam and Eve's sin of disobedience—and for which we are still reaping negative results. Other times we reap the natural effects of ignorant

or careless behavior. America's Dust Bowl years during the Great Depression and the Soviet Union's Chernobyl nuclear disaster are examples of this sort of reaping.

Often, both natural and supernatural consequences occur. A prime example is the result of Israel's failure to give the land rest in compliance with the Sabbath laws of God. There were both natural and supernatural reasons for Sabbath-keeping. Naturally the Sabbath laws provided the rest the land needed from being pressed too hard for its produce. People and animals also required this cessation of work.

There were, however, spiritual reasons for the keeping of the Sabbath. When the people violated the Sabbath laws, God supernaturally brought judgment upon them. Read the reasons for Judah's

captivity in 2 Chronicles 36. This account is summed up in verses 20 and 21:

Those who escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon, where they became servants to him and his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia,

It is our "inner world" that is violated when we thoughtlessly dismiss God's command to care for the "outer world" He has given to us.

to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths. As long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.

God is concerned about the care of our spiritual nature. And it is that “inner world” that is violated when we thoughtlessly dismiss God’s command to care for the “outer world” He has given to us.

How can we celebrate the wonder of God in creation? *By recognizing that the creation is the natural and material source of life and health for all creatures, and by seeking to protect and preserve its capacity to be fruitful.*

WE ARE STEWARDS OF IT

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it (Gen. 2:15).

For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more (Lk. 12:48).

Everyone who is a parent knows well those times when you crawl into bed at night exhausted after spending the greater part of each day in service to your children. In the midst of your child-rearing days, every activity seems attached one way or another to your children. Any thought you previously had about the glamour or the power of being the one in authority over your own children returns to mock you as you change a dirty diaper or try to quiet your terrified child while an emergency room physician applies a cast to a broken arm. “So this is what it’s like to be in charge!” you muse.

The previous points regarding our shared relation with God to creation all lead to a similar reality: God put man in charge of developing all the potentialities He built into the natural world. This is poetically described for us by David in Psalm 8:

You have made [man] a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen—even the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea that pass through the paths of the seas. O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth! (vv.5-9).

Just as our children are bundles of potential surrounded by forces that would destroy them, the earth is a huge ball of potential surrounded by dangerous forces. God cursed the earth because of Adam's sin, so we are compelled to work hard to maintain proper dominion in a realm that is marked by tendencies for decline.

Some Bible scholars have aptly observed that mankind is the “servant species” on the earth. Although we have been given dominion by God the Creator, we carry out our dominion tasks in a manner that emulates the Servant-King Jesus who

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in charge of
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built into the
natural world.**

said, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve” (Mt. 20:28). In our dominion, we must understand that we are servants of God. In a sense, we are servants in the middle: We serve the Creator of the earth as well as His creation.

This truth is highlighted in Genesis 2:15 where the task of tending and keeping the earth, in the fullest sense of the Hebrew words, means doing work for someone, serving someone, saving life, and observing, guarding, and protecting the land. The English term that best characterizes our role is *stewardship*.

***We are servants
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A steward is one whom his master has left in charge. When all the biblical passages about stewardship and servanthood are summed up, they indicate this about our stewardship for God:

- We are expected to increase the yield of our Master's property—which precludes wasting or spoiling it (Gen. 1:28; Mt. 25:14-30; Lk. 16:1-2).
- We are to seek to exemplify our Master in dealing with others under our stewardship (Mt. 10:25; 18:23-35).
- We are expected to carry out our duties to our Master faithfully and in a timely manner (Mt. 24:45-51; 25:21,23).
- We are directly answerable to our Master and can expect consequences for failure to obey Him (Gen. 2:16-17; 3:14-19; Mt. 25:14-30; Lk. 12:45-48; 16:1-2; Rom. 14:12).
- We have reason to express our gratitude regularly to our Master (Ps. 1-150; Rom. 1:21; 2 Cor. 9:10-11; Phil. 4:6).

- We anticipate our Master's return (Mt. 24:45-51; Lk. 12:35-38).

Approaching God's creation with this understanding of stewardship will humble us. We have been given a great responsibility and a great opportunity as "earthkeepers" to take what God has given us, and to honor His name in its use and development.

Because of the complicated division of labor in modern society and because of the economic circumstances in which we live, we are often unaware of the influence we have on the earth and on its capacity to remain fruitful.

Most of us today do not directly till the soil to obtain our food—someone else does that. But we need to remember that every dollar we spend on food indirectly puts a tiller through the soil, applies agricultural

chemicals, harvests produce from living plants, and turns ignition keys on motorized vehicles to get that food to us. The same is true for our clothing, our shelter, and our other necessities—and our wants. We must be as diligent to consider the impact those activities have on the creation as was the farmer of old. He daily faced the reality that if he did not care for his land properly he directly threatened his own life and the lives of all who depended on his stewardship skills.

How can we celebrate the wonder of God in creation? *By remembering that ultimately we are either faithful or unfaithful stewards of God's creation and that we are answerable to our Master for our choices. We are to aim for God's "good earthkeeping seal of approval."*

OUR RELATION TO GOD THROUGH CREATION IT PROVIDES US THE OPPORTUNITY TO WORSHIP

*You are worthy, O Lord,
to receive glory and honor
and power; for You
created all things, and by
Your will they exist and
were created (Rev. 4:11).*

*Every creature which is
in heaven and on the
earth and under the earth
and such as are in the sea,
and all that are in them, I
heard saying: "Blessing
and honor and glory and
power be to Him who sits
on the throne, and to the
Lamb, forever and ever!"
(Rev. 5:13).*

Not too many years ago
I had the opportunity to tag
along on a Christian college
study trip to Yellowstone
and the Grand Tetons. On
a late afternoon that I will

never forget, we pulled the
school van into the parking
area near the frequently
photographed little chapel
that lies dwarfed on the
plateau just east of the
Tetons.

Our group was nearly
alone at the time, so the
biology professor pulled
out a cassette tape he had
brought just for this occasion
and put it in the van's tape
player. Instructing us to get

***The creation is awe-
inspiring because it
reflects the infinite
wisdom and power
of the One who
conceived it.***

out and separate a little from
each other, he opened all the
doors and turned up to full
volume an unforgettable
recording of "How Great

Thou Art!” Soon the grand scenery was veiled by the tears in my eyes as the words of that wonderful song stirred my soul:

When thru the woods
and forest glades I wander
And hear the birds
sing sweetly in the trees,
When I look down
from lofty mountain grandeur
And hear the brook
and feel the gentle breeze,
Then sings my soul,
my Savior God, to Thee;
How great Thou art,
how great Thou art!

In such a setting we could do nothing else but worship. It was as though we were living the doxology, praising God from whom all blessings flow and praising Him with all creatures here below. I’m sure for all people in all times, an overwhelming experience with nature has stimulated them to worship.

Having reason to worship, however, does not mean that we will take the

opportunity to do so. Paul confirmed this in the first chapter of Romans. Sadly, those who attempt to declare independence from the Creator choose to worship the creation instead. Paul elaborated:

Although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the

creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever (Rom. 1:21-25).

The creation is awe-inspiring because it reflects the infinite wisdom and power of the One who conceived it. It holds marvels and secrets that astound all who find them. According to the Bible, this natural world joins the prophets of the ages, eloquently declaring to all people, in all places, and in all times the glory of the Creator God.

For those who reject the Creator, the only alternative is to unwittingly worship the work of the Creator's hand. Man, the crown of creation who was made in the likeness of God, is the most likely god-substitute. Having found countless ways of using the creation to fashion alternative gods, man indulges his own desire for independence and immediate pleasure.

Historically, the sun, the moon, the animal kingdom, the oceans, and "Mother Earth" have all taken turns receiving worship from a rebel race that is bound to worship anything other than the One who alone deserves to be worshiped.

***For those who
reject the Creator,
the only alternative
is to unwittingly
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the Creator's hand.***

Yet when creation is allowed to speak for itself, the sun, the stars, the mountains, and the oceans join with all of the plants and animals of the world to declare the unsurpassed glory of the one true God.

This capacity of the creation to inspire worship

for its Creator has for hundreds of years been celebrated in the hymns of the faith. Consider the song “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee” with the lyrics of Henry van Dyke and the magnificent music from Beethoven’s *Ninth Symphony*:

All Thy works
with joy surround Thee,
Earth and heaven
reflect Thy rays,
Stars and angels
sing around Thee,
Center of unbroken praise.
Field and forest,
vale and mountain,
Flowery meadow,
flashing sea,
Chanting bird
and flowing fountain,
Call us to rejoice in Thee.

This and many other anthems of praise poetically express the truth of the Scriptures, which indicate that the natural world is in many ways a cathedral built with God’s own hands.

Entering that sanctuary on a warm spring morning, we can easily sense that all of nature joins with us in worship of the Creator. Like the psalmist, we can imagine the trees clapping their hands and the mountains and streams praising God—praising Him

***The natural world
is in many ways a
cathedral built with
God’s own hands.***

that they can serve Him by doing what they were created to do. Similarly, we need a steward’s empathy for a natural world so oppressed by the curse and abused by sinful humanity that it groans in its longing for the day when it will share in our final and complete redemption at

the second coming of Christ (Rom. 8:18-23).

How can we celebrate the wonder of God in creation? *By recognizing and enjoying our humble position as fellow worshipers with a natural world, and mysteriously joining together to give praise to our mutual Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer.*

IT PROVIDES US THE OPPORTUNITY TO WITNESS

Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy, and gathered out of the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south (Ps. 107:1-3).

I have a friend who is a professor of ecology in a state university. He's also a committed Christian. A few

years ago, he was presenting a Christian view of ecology to an audience that included a nationally influential Jewish rabbi. At the conclusion of the presentation, the rabbi remarked to him, "Your talk almost convinces me that I ought to reconsider Jesus." My friend, of course, was amazed to hear such a confession. It affirmed for him that a Christian view of creation and its significance is rarely understood outside Christian circles—and only a little less rarely within Christian circles.

From that experience, and many others, this university professor discovered that when the Christian truth about the earth is presented in the hearing of unbelievers, it compels them to listen. The biblical view of the origin, meaning, and destiny of the earth, in combination with the whole of the gospel,

provides the only answer for the world's environmental ills and crises caused by sin. In his book *The Body*, Charles Colson concurs:

We should be contending for truth in every area of life. Not for power or because we are taken with some trendy cause, but humbly to bring glory to God. For this reason, Christians should be the most ardent ecologists. Not because we would rather save spotted owls than cut down trees whose bark provides lifesaving medicine, but because we are mandated to keep the Garden, to ensure that the beauty and grandeur God has reflected in nature is not despoiled. We should care for animals. Not because whales are our brothers, but because animals are part of God's kingdom over which we are to

exercise dominion (p.197).

The sad fact is that the church has poorly understood and demonstrated the biblical principles concerning our stewardship role over creation. In his book on the Christian view of ecology mentioned earlier, Francis Schaeffer talks about the responsibility of the church to address the environmental stress suffered by God's creation:

A truly biblical Christianity has a real answer to the ecological crisis. It offers a balanced and healthy attitude to nature, arising from the truth of its creation by God; it offers the hope here and now of substantial healing in nature of some of the results of the Fall, arising from the truth of redemption in Christ. . . . A Christian-based science

and technology should consciously try to see nature substantially healed, while waiting for the complete future healing at Christ's return (*Pollution And The Death Of Man: The Christian View Of Ecology*, p.81).

“A Christian-based science and technology should consciously try to see nature substantially healed, while waiting for the complete future healing at Christ's return.”

—Francis Schaeffer

As followers of Christ, if we are not demonstrating

care and concern for the handiwork of the God we say we love and worship, we are missing a great opportunity to show the world that the truth of God's Word addresses all the world's distresses. In addition, we will suffer from the spiritual anemia that comes from a failure to apply the whole counsel of God to our Christian behavior. We need to understand that we cannot demonstrate respect for our Creator and Savior at the same time we are demonstrating disrespect for His creation. After all, we and creation will share in the eventual restoration and reconciliation of all things (Acts 3:20-21; Col. 1:20).

How can we celebrate the wonder of God in creation? By taking every opportunity to demonstrate to the watching world a proper concern for all things that come from the hand of our Creator.

OUR RELATION TO OTHERS THROUGH CREATION

WE SHARE IT WITH OUR NEIGHBORS

Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor's life. I am the Lord. Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt. Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself (Lev. 19:16-18 NIV).

We tend to think of technology as something new. It isn't. It's been around since Adam. Technology is nothing more than creative people using the elements of the creation to do their work. Unfortunately, because of Adam's sin and the resultant curse on the creation, technological processes and

products have always been used in ways both evil and good. Cain could use a stick he had sharpened to till the soil—and he could use it to kill his brother.

Technology is significant today because of its extent, its effectiveness, and its capacity to bring about rapid change. Technological skill and increased scientific knowledge, along with the advantages and disadvantages, complicate living in ways unimagined just 50 years ago.

This knowledge, which arises out of God's "other book" of general revelation, raises many questions about how Christians ought to live as they seek to glorify the Creator through obedience to His mandates—in particular the mandate to love our neighbor.

Many pages could be written to illustrate both the benefits and dangers we have inherited through our

technology. Included in the discussion would be issues like human-caused global climate change, air and water pollution, soil erosion, noise pollution, species loss, and fisheries depletion.

The point of such a delineation for Christians would be to understand that the possibility for us to negatively influence our neighbor's life and livelihood has increased a thousand-fold since Bible times. This understanding increases our responsibility to consider others in all we do. It is tempting for us to ignore information about the possible negative effects of our behavior and lifestyles. But it is just as sinful to do that today as it was when life was simpler.

We who believe in Christ the Creator have an obligation to make all our choices with compassionate concern for our neighbors next door, down stream, or

down wind from us. Technology can make our living easier, more comfortable, more exciting, and more profitable. At the same time, it can devastate God's creation in such a way

***As Christians,
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that suffering is created for people on the other side of the street—and on the other side of the globe.

***How can we celebrate
the wonder of God in***

creation? By working diligently to see that our use of the creation does not hurt our neighbor—near or far, directly or indirectly.

WE SHARE IT WITH FUTURE GENERATIONS

Be careful to seek out all the commandments of the Lord your God, that you may possess this good land, and leave it as an inheritance for your children after you forever (1 Chr. 28:8).

If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever (1 Tim. 5:8 NIV).

In the 1980s, commentators often called the younger generation the “Me Generation” or the “Now Generation.” They saw a disturbing attitude among

young people that in essence said, “I want it all, and I want it now.” Considering the greed and materialism the younger generation saw in adults, the cumulative effect of thousands of hours of exposure to “consumer” advertising, the loss of interest in history, the disintegration of the institutions of family and marriage, and the decline of religious values, it is understandable that they would be characterized by self-centeredness.

Contrast that with the attribute of altruism—unselfish concern for the welfare of others. When the Christian values of faith in an eternal God, compassion for others, self-sacrifice, and hope for the future disappear from the general culture, there is little chance that altruism will survive. In fact, most people today would likely have difficulty even

defining the term *altruism*.

As the combined Scripture passages above indicate, people of the Word have a responsibility to provide for their children and to leave for them an

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Christian farmer-philosopher Wendell Berry has written a number of

books that underscore the broad meaning of community—community that includes our ancestors, our current family members and neighbors, our animals and land, and our descendants. These words from the book *What Are People For?* have caused me to consider more carefully the legacy I am leaving:

We do not need to devise a “world of the future”; if we take care of the world of the present, the future will have received full justice from us. A good future is implicit in the soils, forests, grasslands, marshes, deserts, mountains, rivers, lakes, and oceans that we have now; the only valid “futurology” available to us is to take care of those things. We have no need to contrive and dabble at “the future of the human race”; we have the same pressing need that we

have always had—to love, care for, and teach our children (p.188).

Berry elaborates on this last line in the book *Another Turn Of The Crank*:

I know of nothing that so strongly calls into question our ability to care for the world as our present abuses of our own reproductivity. How can we take care of other creatures, all born like ourselves from the world's miraculous fecundity, if we have forsaken the qualities of culture and character that inform the nurture of children. . . . Whatever the reason, it is a fact that we are now conducting a sort of general warfare against children, who are being aborted or abandoned, abused, drugged, bombed, neglected, poorly raised, poorly fed, poorly taught, and poorly

disciplined. Many of them will not only find no worthy work but no work of any kind. All of them will inherit a diminished, diseased,

“We have no need to contrive and dabble at ‘the future of the human race’; we have the same pressing need that we have always had—to love, care for, and teach our children.

—Wendell Berry

and poisoned world. We will visit upon them not only our sins but our debts. We have set

before them thousands of examples—governmental, industrial, and recreational—suggesting that the violent way is the best way. And then we have the hypocrisy to be surprised and troubled when they carry guns and use them (pp.78-79).

This soberes me. As one who believes in Christ, I'd like to think he's describing only non-Christian people. But I'm afraid I see many of these behaviors and attitudes among ourselves. We're a long way from being the community that treasures our past, guards our present, and secures our future. While we look for the any-moment return of Christ, we cannot use this expectation to excuse ourselves from the responsibility to leave God's gift of creation to our children and their children well-kept and undiminished in its capacity to provide for

them what it has provided for us.

We're a long way from being the community that treasures our past, guards our present, and secures our future.

How can we celebrate the wonder of God in creation? *By doing everything we can to guard and protect its ability to provide for our children and their children the treasures we have enjoyed and received from it because of our parents' and their parents' care and concern.*

BELIEF AND BEHAVIOR

The Environmental Movement and the New Age Movement have primarily non-Christian origins. They frequently call for beliefs and behaviors regarding the earth that are contrary to the Word of God. As a result, many followers of Christ tend to think that care for the earth is a pagan concept tied chiefly to earth worship.

Care for God's creation was a major concern of the church long before these popular movements. As early as the fifth century after Christ, the church was observing "rogation days" in the spring of the year to ask God's blessing on the crops being planting and thanking Him for His provision. This practice was common in North America well into the 19th century.

Concern about the

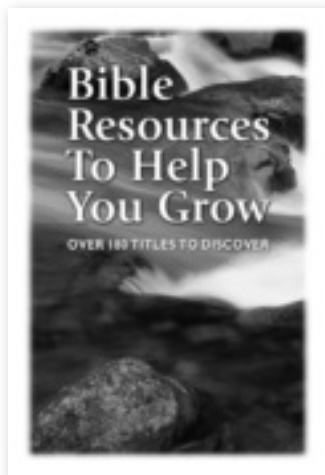
negative impact of commercialism and materialism on God's creation has been expressed through much of the 20th century. In his essay "The Idea Of A Christian Society" (1939), T. S. Eliot wrote, "A wrong attitude toward nature implies, somewhere, a wrong attitude toward God" (p.62).

***"A wrong
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—T. S. Eliot

May our endeavor to celebrate the wonder of creation stimulate in us the right attitude toward God and toward His handiwork upon which we depend.

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